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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000174

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TAGS: [EUN](#) [EZ](#) [EG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH EU PRESIDENCY: HALFWAY POINT, BUT TO WHERE?

REF: A. PRAGUE DAILY 3/26/09

[1B.](#) PRAGUE DAILY 3/25/09

[1C.](#) PRAGUE 159

[1D.](#) PRAGUE DAILY 3/24/09

Classified By: Charge Mary Thompson-Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary: As noted in Reftels, the March 24 no-confidence vote in the Czech Parliament has placed the Czech government in the awkward position of leading the EU, while in a state of flux on the domestic political front. Czech MFA officials nonetheless recognize that they are still responsible for carrying forward the EU presidency agenda and have in personal conversations with emboffs expressed every intention of continuing to do so. How President Klaus' decision to proceed with an "outgoing government" in place for the short term leaves open the critical question of who will take the helm in the medium term (Ref A), and thus, how effective the Czechs are in the remaining three months of their presidency. Of EU and non-EU officials that emboffs have spoken with in the last few days, however, few anticipate problems for the Czechs carrying out ordinary EU business. It is with respect to matters requiring strong EU leadership -- building alliances or consensus around controversial issues or where there are widely diverging opinions -- that others anticipate the Czechs may have difficulty delivering. End Summary.

Czechs Remain Responsible for Continuing Onward

[12.](#) (SBU) The European Commission has already issued statements expressing "full trust" that the country would continue its EU presidency "as effectively as it has done until now." (Note: the Czechs, who are known for their love of double entendre, are likely wincing over this phrasing. End Note.) Indeed, past EU governments have fallen while leading the EU, such as the Italians in 1996 and the Danes in 1993, and the Presidency country remains obligated to continue onward. While Czech officials have only had hours to adjust to the idea that the Czech government is now an "outgoing government," at the working level things continue much as before. Within the Czech MFA CFSP department, for example, the European Correspondent and Deputy are fully focused on pulling together preparations for the EU Foreign Ministers informal meeting, which the Czechs host March 27-28.

Implications Moving Forward Through June

[13.](#) (SBU) While much gets done within the EU at the working level, it is often at the highest levels where leadership really tips the balance on whether or not something significant or important is accomplished within the EU. Here the Czechs may have difficulties. While MFA officials acknowledged March 26 that FM Schwarzenberg "has had difficulty concentrating on EU affairs," much the same is

likely true of all of the Czech Ministers currently. We can anticipate that until there is greater clarity as to whether the "outgoing government" will remain, or whether additional changes are on the way, many of the ministers will be focused on domestic politics, rather than on the agenda of the EU.

¶4. (C) This could be potentially worrying for progress on such things as Guantanamo detainees (for example) since the EU has been speaking about developing an EU umbrella framework. Much of the work pulling something like this together and building a consensus at the EU Foreign, Interior, and Prime Ministerial levels would fall to the Czechs working closely with the Council Secretariat, especially since not all EU members agree on how the EU should handle this subject. This is unlikely to advance much at the moment, considering the person responsible for some of the heavy lifting for the Czechs was Interior Minister Ivan Langer, who has been under pressure from the Czech opposition to resign. (Note: This is simply one illustrative example; once there is greater clarity on where things stand on the domestic political front, it will be easier to pinpoint which aspects of U.S.-EU cooperation may or may not be affected. End Note.)

Summits This Spring

¶4. (SBU) While there are a number of EU Summits scheduled over the next few months, it is very plausible that the Czechs will not add more to the existing schedule. Thus, summits that were under consideration, but not yet scheduled, may simply not materialize, or materialize later under the

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Swedish presidency. As well, President Klaus was previously scheduled to represent the Czech Republic at several summits (EU-Korea, EU-Japan, EU-Russia), instead of PM Topolanek, especially at the ones involving lengthy travel. In conversations with emboffs, officials from Klaus' office implied that Klaus may take on a larger role at upcoming summits. (Note: President Klaus has pressed hard for a large role during the visit of President Obama, even though his position until now has been largely ceremonial. End Note.) One disappointment from a foreign policy angle is that while the Czechs had hoped prior to assuming the Presidency that conditions might allow for an EU summit with Israel during their presidency, MFA officials opined March 25 that given the earlier problems in Gaza, the current state of transition in Israel and Palestine, and the divergent EU views on all these elements, such a summit is "inconceivable" at present.

¶5. (C) Comment: As everyone can well understand, domestic political developments are very much subject to change at the moment and these changes could have very different implications for the Czech EU Presidency. As well, much could depend upon how other EU member states, the Council Secretariat and the Commission react to these developments, and the results of the no-confidence vote appear to have taken many other diplomatic missions in Prague by surprise. Thompson-Jones